



## Progressive Women?

In relation to the previous text we asked: Is the Progressive Women's Movement (PWM) supposed to be a subsidiary of the ANC Women's League, and therefore a junior partner of the ANC? Or is the PWM a wider movement, open to all women, of which the ANCWL is only one part among many? To what extent have the problems and tensions of the FEDSAW period in the 1950s been solved? Or, have those problems not been solved?

The attached and linked download is one document compiled of three documents. They are the PWM Base Document, the PWM Founding Document, and the PWM Declaration of 8 August 2006, from the founding gathering in Mangaung. All three documents were previously downloaded by the CU from a PWM page at the ANCWL web site, where the PWM logo, rather similar to that of the ANCWL, was displayed.

There was, in 2011, a separate PWM web site, at <http://pwmsa.org/>. On this new PWM web site, it said, among other things:

*“The Progressive Women's Movement of South Africa (PWMSA) is a Not-for-Profit Organisation registration number 051-728-NPO, launched in Bloemfontein on the 8th August 2006 to coincide with the 50th Anniversary of the 1956 march of 20 000 South African Women to the Union Buildings to protest against apartheid.*

*“After extensive discussions, as the ANCWL and Alliance partners we have agreed that a Women's Movement is a broad front of women's organisations, grassroots organisations of all kinds, feminist oriented groups, researchers, faith based organisations, traditional healers, women involved in policy formulation and programmes.*

*“The Movement was launched to create a broad front for development for the women of South Africa - one that would enable women to speak with one voice to address their concerns using a single platform of action irrespective of race, class, religion, political and social standing.*

*“To date, membership of the movement comprises more than thirty-five national organisations and institutions that represent civil society, labour, faith-based, political parties, business, arts and culture and professional*

*bodies, non-governmental organisations, political parties, professional bodies and faith based organisations.”*

A search of the new site did not reveal the list of the “more than thirty-five national organisations”. Perhaps this vital information will be coming later.

In a previous edition of this course “No Woman, No Revolution”, which has been run a number of times by the Communist University since 2006, we noted that on Thursday, 20 August 2009, the Progressive Women’s Movement’s third-anniversary banquet was featured on the SABC glamour-and-fashion programme, [Top Billing](#). It was a high-society occasion. The President of the Republic was a guest. Our picture is of President Jacob Zuma being interviewed by Top Billing during that PWM banquet. We noted that it was not clear who was the leader of the PWM on that occasion.

Now, on the new web site, the names of the Working Committee are given, and a physical address is given at 77 Fox Street, Johannesburg, [with other contact details](#).

The working committee members in 2011 were: **Ms. Baleka Mbete** (National Convener; Former Deputy President); Ms. Aziwe Magida; Ms. Gertrude Mtshweni; Dr. Gwen Ramokgopa (Deputy Minister, DoH); Ms. Lulama Nare; Ms. Maria Ntuli (Deputy Minister, DSD); Ms. Sylvia Stephens-Maziya; Ms. Zukiswa Ncitha.

The [PWM Base Document](#) says, among other things:

*“The ANC and the ANC WL... have held a view that there is a need for some kind of an organic structure that will take up broader issues of women in the South African Society.*

*“In October 2005 during one of its meetings the National Executive Committee of the Women's League decided it would be ideal if South African women to formalize a Progressive Women's Movement in 2006.*

*“After extensive discussions, as the ANCWL and Alliance partners we have agreed that a Women's Movement is a broad front of women's organisations, grassroots organisations of all kinds, feminist oriented groups, researchers, faith based organisations, traditional healers, women involved in policy formulation and programmes.*

***“Character of the PWM: Organic - not a formal structure.***

***“Objectives: Unite the women of South Africa in diversity; strengthen the relationship between the government and women's organisations.”***

The Base Document therefore confirms that the PWM is an ANC initiative, that it is a combination of women's organisations, not individuals, that it shall be “organic” and “not a formal structure”, and that its purpose is to bind the women to the government.

The [PWM Foundation Document](#) says, among other things:

*“Regular membership of the movement shall be open to any progressive South African women's organisation and formations that work with women that share the values and principles of the PWMSA.*

***“National Steering Committee, Selection and Tenure:*** *National Conference shall identify sectors for representation to the steering committee. After the Conference of the PWMSA the previous committee in conjunction with the newly seconded members will convene a handing over meeting within a period of a month.”*

[Steering Committee members are “identified” and “seconded”. This formula is repeated at Provincial level. The word “elect”, or “election”, is never used. Terms are five years (National) and three years (Provincial).]

***“Powers and Duties of the National Steering Committee:*** *The Steering Committee shall elect a **Convenor** and assign portfolios and responsibilities to the members of the Steering Committee; They shall carry out and monitor the decisions of the National Conference; They shall coordinate the establishment of Provincial Steering Committees”*

***“Committees:*** *There shall be such other Committee(s)*

*and ad hoc committees, as the Steering Committee may from time to time deem necessary; Each Committee shall have a **Coordinator**.*

*“At any **National Conference** the only business that shall be discussed shall be that which has been specified in the written request lodged by the members concerned, unless the Steering Committee in her discretion otherwise permits.*

*“The **Steering Committee** shall have the power to authorise expenditure on behalf of the Movement from time to time for the purposes of furthering the objectives of the Movement in accordance with such terms and conditions as the Member Organisation of the Steering Committee may direct. The monies of the Movement shall be deposited and disbursed in accordance with any Banking Resolution passed by the Steering Committee. Each member shall, on an annual basis pay dues for every five years.”*

It appears that in order to be “*organic and not a formal structure*”, the PWM was to be at least as tightly structured as a normal, constitutionally organised democratic body. The requirement to be “not a formal structure” is only attempted in this very formal document to the extent that although there is a Convenor and there are Co-ordinators, there are no Presidents, Chairpersons or Secretaries; that the basis of delegate status at conferences is not spelled out; and that there is selection, and secondment, but there are no

elections.

Like FEDSAW in the 1950s, the PWM is not allowed to have a mass individual membership. It only has corporate members. Who they all are, is not yet public information.

There is a desire in some women, and men, to flee from the mass-democratic organisational forms that are normal to the labour movement, of the kind that were championed by other women like the late, great [Ray Alexander](#), for example. The desire to shun such democratic forms of mass organisation has a basis in the conflicted philosophy of feminism. It is related to the contradiction noted by [Alexandra Kollontai](#) a century ago, between bourgeois feminism, and working-class politics.

- The above is to introduce the original reading-text: [PWM Base Document, Founding Document, and Declaration, 2006](#).
- To download any of the CU courses in PDF files [please click here](#).